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Mastermind of Swap— A Tough-Minded Realist

James Britt Donovan is a tough - minded realist who knows spying is part of a nation's way of life.

Two years ago he wrote for America, the national Catholic weekly review, and article, "Why We Must Spy," in which he stated strategic intelligence is necessary for a country to make "informed decisions" and need not be aimed only at potential enemies.

Spies "will always be used," he said, but "the great bulk of the most important intelligence is not obtained by secret espionage, but by overt means."

A lawyer, Mr. Donovan has viewed the espionage scene from several vantage points—during World War II as general counsel to the Office of Strategic Services, in the late 1950s as court-appointed attorney for Col. Rudolf Ivanovich Abel, and most recently as the master mediator who helped to arrange the swap with Russia of Able for Francis Gary Powers.

These were assignments formidable as the labors of Hercules, but Mr. Donovan was equal to them. Indeed, he has drawn Herculean assignments throughout his career. For example, when Mayor Wagner remade the Board of Education last September following revelations of scandal in the school system, he appointed Mr. Donovan as one of nine new board members. The trustees elected him board vice-president.

When he took this non-salaried job he resigned as a member of the New York Commission, a position he had held for ten years, also without pay. The commission rules on designs for new school buildings, and Mr. Donovan wanted to avoid possible conflict of interest.

On another matter of principle, Mr. Donovan said he would not accept a fee for the Abel case. When he received \$10,000 for the job, he donated the money to Fordham, Harvard and Columbia Universities, and said, "There is more to practicing law than making money."

He is forty-five years old, though purists might say he is only one-fourth that age. His is a leap-year birthday, falling on Feb. 29. He was born in the Bronx, son of a prominent surgeon, Dr. John J. Donovan, and attended All Hallows Institute, Fordham College and Harvard Law School, where he edited the year book.

During World War II he worked for the Federal Office of Scientific Research and Development. He joined the Navy and rose to the rank of commander, and worked for the late Gen. William (Wild Bill) Donovan of the OSS. And after the war he became an assistant prosecutor of Nazi war criminals at Nuernberg. He lives at 35 Prospect Park West, Brooklyn. He and his wife, Mary, have four children.